

VZCZCXRO3309
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHMS #0251/01 0890559
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 300559Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0269
INFO ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MUSCAT 000251

SIPDIS SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-03-29

TAGS: PREL EG QA IR MU

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR REVIEWS PRESIDENT MUBARAK'S MARCH 18-22 VISIT TO MUSCAT

CLASSIFIED BY: Gary A. Grappo, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In his March 18-22 visit to Muscat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Sultan Qaboos:

-- shared their optimism about the new U.S. administration;

-- agreed that continuing divisions among the Palestinians, compounded by Iranian interference and unhelpful Qatari and Syrian actions, exacerbated divisions within the Arab League;

-- decided to work for a common Arab position on Palestinian unity and on Mideast peace at the upcoming AL summit in Doha;

-- discussed the current state of play in the Iranian presidential election; and

-- expressed their opposition to the recent ICC warrant against Sudanese President al Bashir.

In separate meetings between Egyptian FM Abul Gheit and Omani FM bin Alawi, the former rebuffed Oman's offer to mediate the ongoing dispute between Qatar and Egypt. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Egyptian Ambassador to Oman, Ezz El Din Fahmy, briefed the Ambassador March 28 on President Mubarak's four-day visit to Oman one week ago. The visit was both official and personal. The president spent the evening of March 18 at the Sultan's official Guest House at Qasr Al 'Alem in old Muscat for official meetings and a working dinner. For these, he was joined by his foreign minister, several economic ministers and the Egyptian ambassador. The following day, the president was joined by his entire family at the Sultan's Beit Al Baraka Palace outside Muscat for several days of "vacation." The Sultan accompanied the president and his family on all their in-country travel and hosted the Mubarak family for dinner each evening. No officials accompanied either party during the unofficial portion of the visit.

U.S. Administration: Positive So Far but a Need for Action

¶3. (C) Both Arab leaders expressed their optimism about the new

U.S. administration and were especially encouraged by President Obama's quick action to appoint Senator Mitchell to begin work immediately on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Egyptian president underscored the critical importance of a pro-active U.S. administration to the Mideast peace process and, in particular, highlighted the need for the U.S. to bring significant pressure to bear on the new Israeli government to halt Israeli settlements in the West Bank and begin the process of creating a viable Palestinian state. Nevertheless, both leaders reserved final judgment until they saw "concrete action" by the U.S. to resolve outstanding issues.

Hamas Ready to Negotiate; Palestinian Unity Critical

¶4. (C) The two leaders agreed that by provoking the Gaza crisis, Hamas had failed to secure genuine long-term support for itself and had erred disastrously. In fact, Mubarak allegedly reported, at the height of the crisis, the Israelis had come "within 200 meters" of demolishing Hamas' headquarters in Gaza. The Hamas leadership now recognized that they had to come to terms with the Palestinian Authority and reach an acceptable basis for dealing with the Israelis, for which it would need the support of key Arab states, like Egypt. The Sultan reportedly agreed, advising that Oman's FM bin Alawi had noted a strikingly more conciliatory tone in the comments of Hamas Political Chief Khalid Mishal in discussions with Mishal and other Hamas figures during bin Alawi's January trip to

MUSCAT 00000251 002 OF 003

Damascus.

¶5. (C) Mubarak reported that Egypt's efforts in trying to bring the two Palestinian sides together had been frustrated by Qatar, especially the Al Jazeera attack on Egypt, and Syria and by Iranian interference. The Omanis tried to deflect the discussion away from Qatar, dismissing the Qatari media attacks as "Al Jazeera being Al Jazeera." The Omanis reportedly suggested that the Egyptians should have allowed their media, think tanks and independent experts to respond to Al Jazeera as opposed to responding directly. Mubarak, nevertheless, made it clear that he perceived the attack as one intended to tarnish Egypt's image and usurp Egypt's role in the Mideast peace process. Both he and Abul Gheit underscored the need for "the key Arab states" -- Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Palestine -- to retain the principal role for leading Arab peace negotiations with Israel and the U.S.

¶6. (C) Both leaders agreed on the need to form a unity government among the Palestinians quickly and that divisions among the Palestinians were exacerbating divisions in the greater Arab League. Mubarak again harped on the unhelpful role played by Qatar and Syria within the Arab League and also drew attention to Iran's interference. In explaining the Omani position vis a vis Doha and Damascus and Oman's recent conciliatory outreach to both capitals, the Egyptian ambassador said he sensed that Oman wanted to maintain its independence, as opposed to actually taking sides, so as to play a potentially mediating role within the Arab League and also to avoid prejudicing its own sensitivities and cautious position on Iran. The Egyptian president emphasized to the Sultan, however, that Iran "was not helping the Arabs" in Palestine. Both leaders agreed that at this week's AL summit, they would work to advance Palestinian unity and a common position on Mideast peace. (Note: Neither Mubarak nor Qaboos is expected to attend the Doha AL gathering.)

Lamenting Khatami's Withdrawal from Iranian Presidential Election

¶ 7. (C) Both Mubarak and Qaboos expressed regret over the withdrawal of former Iranian president Khatami from the June election. Nevertheless, they recognized that more than one moderate candidate on the election ballot would likely split the reformist/moderate vote in Iran, assuring Ahmadinejad victory. Moussavi represents nearly as attractive a moderate as Khatami and could still capture significant support among Iran's electorate and even that of the Supreme Leader.

¶ 8. (C) Ambassador Fahmy opined that Oman may be experiencing an uncharacteristically awkward period in its relations with Iran. He said that Iranian parliament speaker Ali Larijani had requested to speak at the Arab Parliamentarian Union gathering in Muscat last January and was rebuffed by the Omani hosts. Separately, the Iranians asked for an audience for him with the Sultan, which the Omanis would not confirm until Larijani arrived in Muscat. During the parliamentarian conference, Larijani made an unexpected stop in Muscat and renewed his request to speak to the assembled conferees and to meet with the Sultan. Both were rejected and Larijani departed abruptly. The Egyptian ambassador characterized Oman's treatment of the senior Iranian as "very irregular."

What about Al Bashir?

¶ 9. (C) According to the Egyptian ambassador, both Mubarak and Qaboos stated their opposition to the ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Al Bashir, characterizing it as unprecedented as it would set a very bad precedent for future and even past heads of state. However, they also indicated that Al Bashir had handled the matter very poorly, especially his decision to expel aid organizations carrying out critical humanitarian work in Sudan. Mubarak indicated that Egypt was looking at crafting some ideas to be presented to the UNSC that would allow for greater action by the UN in Darfur and lead to some alternative for Bashir to deal with the ICC.

MUSCAT 00000251 003 OF 003

On Qatar, No Help Needed

¶ 10. (C) In a separate meeting between Egypt's and Oman's FMs, attended by Ambassador Fahmy, the Omani minister offered to mediate the ongoing dispute between Egypt and Qatar. Before bin Alawi could finish his sentence, Abul Gheit interjected that if the Qataris wanted to improve the relationship, they would have to take the first step by apologizing for their behavior. It was Qatar who instigated the matter and would, therefore, have to take responsibility for correcting it. Egypt wanted the support of the GCC countries in its efforts to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but Qatar, by its recent actions, had sought to undermine Egypt, even embarrassing Egypt publicly. The Omani minister was surprised by the harsh tone of Egyptian's remarks and agreed "to stay out of it."

Independent Assessment

¶ 11. (C) Separately, Dr. Omar Zawawi, the Sultan's Special Advisor for External Affairs, told the Ambassador that the visit had been extraordinarily successful, allowing the Egyptian president ample time for rest and his family, and both leaders significant time to converse between themselves. Dr. Zawawi, who has been a close friend of the Mubaraks for more than 30 years, commented that President Mubarak appeared in excellent health, although he seemed to favor one leg due to an apparent knee ailment. He further characterized the Sultan's relationship with Mubarak as "one of the closest he has" with his Arab counterparts.

GRAPPO